



Weather Forecast

HYDERABAD	VIJAYAWADA	TIRUPATHI
H 33° C L 25° C	H 35° C L 26° C	H 36° C L 26° C

Nepal girl's death in Odisha's KIIT college sparks stir, PM Oli reacts



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on Monday addressed the incident involving Nepalese students at Odisha's Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) University, following the death of a Nepalese student. He confirmed that the country's embassy in New Delhi had dispatched two officers to assist the affected students who were allegedly forced to evacuate the university's hostel in the wake of the tragedy.

The incident, which occurred on Sunday, saw the death of a third-year B.Tech student at KIIT's hostel in Bhubaneswar. The cause of death has not yet been fully disclosed, but the university administration called the incident "unfortunate." The

police have reportedly arrested an accused individual in connection with the case. The university issued a statement assuring that all efforts were being made to restore normalcy to the campus and resume academic activities.

The situation escalated when a notice was circulated on campus, instructing Nepalese students to vacate immediately. The university claimed that discussions with protesting students led to an agreement to leave the campus, but Nepalese students, including Rajan Gupta and Anil Prasad Yadav, alleged they were forcibly evicted without proper notice or assistance. They expressed frustration over the lack of clarity on the incident and the challenges they faced in securing transportation or food.

Prime Minister Oli, who was made aware of the situation through media reports, assured that the Nepalese government was in constant touch with the relevant authorities in India, including KIIT management and the Odisha state government. He extended condolences to the family of the deceased student and confirmed that Nepalese students would have the option to either stay in the hostel or return to Nepal, based on their preference.



PM Modi makes an exception, goes to Delhi Airport to Receive Qatar Amir

PM Modi personally receives Qatar's Amir in Delhi.

Talks to focus on trade, investment, and security.

Visit strengthens India-Qatar strategic ties.

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a special gesture on Monday by personally receiving the Amir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi. The warm reception was also

attended by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, marking the significance of the Amir's state visit to India.

Sheikh Tamim's visit, scheduled from February 17 to 18, aims to strengthen bilateral ties between India and Qatar. During his stay, the Amir is set to engage in high-level discussions with key Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, President Droupadi Murmu, and Foreign Minister Jaishankar. These talks are expected to focus on enhancing the growing multifaceted partnership between the two countries.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) expressed that the visit will offer further momentum to the already robust India-Qatar relationship, particularly in areas such as trade, investment, and regional security. Qatar's Amir is ac-

companied by a prominent delegation, which includes several ministers, senior officials, and business leaders, underscoring the importance of the visit from a diplomatic and economic perspective.

This state visit is a reflection of the deepening ties between India and Qatar, particularly in sectors such as energy, trade, and people-to-people exchanges. The visit also provides an opportunity to explore new avenues for cooperation and to address mutual interests in regional and global issues.

As India continues to strengthen its relationships with key global partners, the visit of the Amir of Qatar highlights the strategic importance of bilateral diplomacy in fostering peace, security, and prosperity across the region.

US Approves Extradition of 26/11 Mumbai Attacks Conspirator Tahawwur Rana to India

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a key conspirator in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, is set to be extradited to India following approval from the United States. US President Donald Trump announced the decision on Thursday, labeling Rana as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world." Rana, a Pakistani-born Canadian national, was involved in the attacks as part of a wider conspiracy orchestrated by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Harakat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), terrorist organizations based in Pakistan.

Rana, aged 64, is currently under supervised detention in a Los Angeles metropolitan detention center. This follows his completion of a 14-year sentence in 2023. Rana had closely collaborated with Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, who was a central figure in the planning of the Mumbai attacks. Once extradited to India, Rana will face trial, making him the third person to be sent to India for prosecution in connection with



the attacks. The other two individuals, Ajmal Kasab and Zabiuddin Ansari (also known as Abu Jundal), were involved in the attacks and were either sentenced or are facing charges in India.

Rana's involvement in the conspiracy came to light during investigations by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which filed a chargesheet against him in 2011. According to the NIA, Rana had been part of the criminal conspiracy from the early stages of the planning process in 2005. His actions played a crucial role in the execution of the deadly attacks that killed over 170 people in Mumbai.

BJP Delays Delhi CM Meeting and Swearing-In to Feb 21

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has postponed its legislature party meeting, initially scheduled for Monday, to finalise the name of Delhi's next chief minister. The meeting will now take place on February 20, Thursday, and the swearing-in ceremony, which was earlier expected on February 19, has also been pushed back. The ceremony is now anticipated to occur on February 21.

The decision to delay these events was made during a meeting attended by BJP National General Secretary BL Santhosh, along with senior party leaders Virendra Sachdeva, Pawan Rana, and others. The BJP had secured a resounding victory in Delhi, winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats in the February 5 polls, marking its return to power in the capital after 27 years. Despite the win, the party had not declared a candidate for the position of chief minister before or after the elections.

It was also decided that the selection of the



chief minister would be finalized after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's overseas trip to France and the US, which concluded on Friday. BJP leaders including Parvesh Verma, who defeated former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi, Vijender Gupta, and Satish Upadhyay are among the frontrunners for the top position.

Additionally, there are other potential candidates for the chief minister's role, including Pawan Sharma, Ashish Sood, Rekha Gupta, and Shikha Rai. The BJP is also considering the possibility of selecting a woman for the position, with Neelam Pahalwan, Rekha Gupta, Poonam Sharma, and Shikha Roy, all of whom won in the elections, being names in the running.

4.0 Magnitude Earthquake Hit Delhi-NCR

- earthquake rattles Delhi reported.
- Tremors felt across NCR, with loud sound
- lies in high-seismicity zone.

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

A strong earthquake of magnitude 4.0 struck Delhi early this morning, with tremors felt across several parts of the national capital. According to the National Centre for Seismology, the earthquake occurred at a depth of approximately 5 kilometers. While there were no reports of injuries or casualties, residents described hearing a loud sound when the tremors hit.

The loud grumbling sound reported by residents is typical of shallow-focus earthquakes. According to the US Geological Survey (USGS), the high-frequency vibrations from shallow earthquakes generate a booming noise as the ground vibrates. This vibration produces seismic waves that travel through the air, resulting in sound waves. The shallower the epicenter, the greater the energy and sound generated.



Delhi lies in Seismic Zone IV, an area with relatively high seismicity, as per the Delhi Disaster Management Authority. Earthquakes in this zone typically range from 5-6 in magnitude, but occasionally can reach 7-8. The seismic activity in North India is caused by the collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates. As these plates collide and store energy, it eventually leads to the release of energy in the form of an earthquake.

Shallow earthquakes, which originate within 10 kilometers of the surface, tend to cause more damage than deeper ones. The Dhuala Kuan area, where today's earthquake's epicenter was located, has

experienced smaller quakes in the past, including a 3.3 magnitude earthquake in 2015.

The earthquake shook Delhi residents, with many describing it as one of the strongest they had ever felt. Videos captured the intensity of the tremors, showing tank pipes and wires shaking. A passenger at the New Delhi Railway Station compared the experience to the collapse of a bridge, while others reported that it felt like a train passing by, with buildings shaking.

Following the quake, Delhi police urged residents to call the 112 emergency helpline if they needed assistance, expressing hopes for everyone's safety.

Madhya Pradesh Govt Restrict Liquor Sale in 19 Locations Under New Excise Policy

TPN Correspondent | Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is set to implement a new Excise Policy starting April 1, 2025, which will restrict the sale of liquor in 19 specific locations, including 17 religious cities. This move aims to regulate alcohol consumption in certain areas, with a focus on maintaining religious and cultural values.



One of the key features of the new policy is the introduction of "low alcoholic beverage bars." These bars will only serve drinks with a maximum alcohol content of 10% by volume, such as beer, wine, and ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages. The policy strictly prohibits the consumption of spirits, such as hard liquor, in these establishments.

According to a government release, the new bars will offer a range of low-alcohol options, catering to those seeking a lighter drinking experience. This is part of the state's effort to regulate alcohol consumption while maintaining a balance between business interests and public welfare.

Currently, Madhya Pradesh has around 460 to 470 liquor-cum-beer bars. With the

introduction of the new low-alcohol bars, the number of outlets is expected to rise significantly. An official from the excise department stated that the new policy is designed to provide a controlled environment for alcohol consumption in religious and sensitive areas.

The policy also aims to strike a balance between the need for regulation and the demand for alcohol, especially in tourist-heavy or culturally sensitive locations. As the new policy is rolled out, it is expected to have a significant impact on how alcohol is consumed in Madhya Pradesh, particularly in regions with religious significance.

The state's new excise measures reflect an ongoing effort to address concerns related to alcohol consumption while respecting local customs and traditions.

Delhi may see three BJP CMs in next five years', predicts AAP's Gopal Rai

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) senior leader Gopal Rai has criticized the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for its continued delay in naming the next chief minister of Delhi. Rai, a former Delhi minister, expressed concerns that the delay could result in the city having three different CMs in the next five years, similar to the situation during the BJP's previous tenure.



Rai pointed out the BJP's internal turmoil, citing their inability to decide on a leader even 10 days after the elections. He remarked, "Even after 10 days, they still can't decide on a CM, which shows they don't have a clear leader." He also suggested that the situation could mirror the last BJP term when Delhi witnessed multiple leadership changes.

Rai made it clear that AAP would provide a strong opposition to the BJP, ensuring the party stays accountable to its promises made during the election campaign.

"The BJP used all its tactics during the campaign, even working with the Election Commission. Despite all their efforts, the people of Delhi chose to stand with us, and we're grateful for that," he said.

He further added that although AAP's margin of victory was narrow, the party would continue to fight for the people of Delhi, emphasizing that the ongoing BJP power struggles could lead to difficulties for the new CM. Rai's remarks serve as a pointed critique of the BJP's handling of leadership issues within its ranks.

US Plane With 3rd Batch Of Illegal Indian Immigrants Lands In Amritsar

TPN Correspondent | Amritsar

A plane carrying 112 Indians, deported from the United States for illegally residing there, landed in Amritsar on Sunday night. This marks the third such arrival within 10 days, following a crackdown on illegal immigrants by the Donald Trump administration. The C-17 Globemaster aircraft of the US Air Force arrived at Amritsar International Airport around 10:03 pm.

The deportees, who were part of a broader operation, included individuals from Punjab (31), Haryana (44), Gujarat (33), Uttar Pradesh (2), Himachal Pradesh (1), and Uttarakhand (1). Family members of some deportees were present at the airport to greet them. After completing formalities such as immigration, verification, and background checks, the deportees will be allowed to return home. Transportation arrangements have been made for their journey.

This is the third flight in a series of deportations. The first round took place on February 5, when 104 Indians were deported, followed by a second round on February 15 with 116 deportees. The deportation process, particularly the practice of shackling

and restraining individuals during the flight, has sparked controversy in India. The first deportees faced criticism over their treatment, leading to protests and debates in the Indian Parliament. Similar allegations were raised after the second round of deportations.

In response to the backlash, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that the Indian government is engaging with the US to ensure deportees are treated humanely. He emphasized that deportations of illegal migrants by the US are not a new issue and have been ongoing for years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his recent visit to the US, reiterated India's commitment to taking back its citizens living illegally in the US, while stressing the need to combat human trafficking.

The US Embassy in India defended the deportations, stating that enforcing immigration laws is crucial for national security and public safety. India is the third-largest source of undocumented immigrants in the US, after Mexico and El Salvador. Many deportees, especially those from Punjab, had hoped for a better life in the US, but their dreams were shattered upon being apprehended and deported.

Jaishankar Meets Bangladesh Foreign Advisor, Discusses Bilateral Ties, BIMSTEC

TPN Correspondent | Imphal

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a meeting with Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Advisor Md. Touhid Hossain on Sunday, where they discussed the state of bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as the future of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Jaishankar shared details of the meeting in a post on X, noting that the conversation also centered around BIMSTEC's ongoing activities.

BIMSTEC, a regional cooperation organization, comprises seven countries: Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal. Bangladesh is set to assume the chairmanship of the BIMSTEC summit, which is scheduled to be held in Bangkok from April 2 to 4 this year.

The meeting between Jaishankar and Hossain took place on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference in Oman, a diplomatic setting aimed at preventing further tensions in India-Bangladesh relations. The bilateral ties between the two nations had recently faced significant strains, particularly following the ousting of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August of the previous year.

Hasina's departure, amid massive anti-government protests, led to a period of political instability in



Bangladesh, during which Nobel Peace laureate Mohammad Yunus assumed power. The political shift exacerbated tensions, especially after a series of violent incidents targeting minority Hindus and other religious communities in Bangladesh. The attacks, including the desecration of Hindu temples, raised significant concerns in New Delhi, further straining diplomatic ties.

India's government, particularly under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has expressed its concerns about the safety and security of minorities in Bangladesh and the broader political situation in the country. The recent meeting between Jaishankar and Hossain is seen as an effort to restore stability in their bilateral relationship and maintain cooperation within the framework of BIMSTEC, despite the challenges.

Congress In Kerala Criticises Shashi Tharoor For Praising Left Government

TPN Correspondent | Thiruvananthapuram:

Veekshanam Daily, the Congress party's mouthpiece in Kerala, published a scathing editorial on Monday, indirectly criticizing Congress leader Shashi Tharoor for his recent comments on the state's entrepreneurial growth under the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government. While the editorial did not name Tharoor directly, it urged him not to betray the expectations of Congress workers ahead of the upcoming local body elections.

The editorial expressed concerns over the growing anti-indebtedness sentiment in the state, accusing certain individuals within the party of attempting to suppress the wave instead of addressing it. The piece effectively dismissed Tharoor's clarification, in which he had insisted that his article in an English daily was not a political commentary but rather a focus on Kerala's startup sector. Tharoor had claimed his intention was solely to highlight the state's progress in entrepreneurial and innovation-driven growth.

Despite Tharoor's defense, Veekshanam Daily sharp-

ly criticized his remarks, warning that any failure of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in the local elections would be a major setback. The editorial labeled attempts to undermine the party's prospects as "ridiculous" and called any such actions "suicidal" for the Congress.



The article also accused the ruling CPI(M) of making Kerala a "graveyard" for industries, arguing that significant industrial growth occurred under past Congress Chief Ministers such as A K Antony, Oommen Chandy, and others. It specifically questioned the achievements of the current Industries Minister, P Rajeev, compared to his predecessors, and denounced the CPI(M)'s past opposition to industrial projects.

In addition to critiquing Tharoor's remarks on Kerala's industrial growth, the editorial also targeted his positive comments about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the United States, questioning the significance of the gesture. The editorial concluded by emphasizing the need for the Congress to maintain a strong opposition stance against the LDF government and not weaken itself from within.

Govt wants control not credibility: Congress on meeting to pick poll body chief



- Congress seeks delay in CEC appointment.
- Rahul Gandhi questions CJ's exclusion.
- Gyanesh Kumar to be next CEC.

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

On Monday, the Congress party expressed concerns over a meeting called by the central government to elect the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), urging that the process be delayed until the Supreme Court delivers its verdict on the formation of the selection panel. The party argued that since the Supreme Court was set to hear the matter on February 19 and would provide a decision on the composition of the panel, today's meeting should have been postponed.

Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi criticized the government's actions, particularly the exclusion of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) from the appointment process. He argued that this exclusion signified the government's desire for control over the Election Commission, at the expense of its credibility. "The most important thing for the Election Commission is credibility," Singhvi emphasized, asserting that the CJI's involvement was crucial to maintaining the institution's independence.

This statement came after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attended a meeting for the appointment of the next CEC, alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal. Gandhi questioned the exclusion of the CJI from the panel, referencing the changes made to the Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. "Why was the Chief Justice removed from the committee?" Gandhi asked, directing his inquiry to the Prime Minister during a recent session of Parliament.

The CEC, Rajiv Kumar, is set to retire on February 18, and the senior-most Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar, will assume the position of CEC following Kumar's departure. Gyanesh Kumar's tenure as CEC will last until January 26, 2029. The Congress party's call for postponing the meeting underscores the growing tensions surrounding the appointment process, particularly amid questions about its transparency and impartiality.

Stop Assuming China Is Enemy From Day One: Rahul Gandhi's Aide Sam Pitroda



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Congress veteran Sam Pitroda has stirred controversy with his recent remarks downplaying the threat posed by China, asserting that the issue is often exaggerated. A close aide to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Pitroda suggested that India's confrontational stance towards China needs to change and that the time has come to recognize and respect China's growing influence.

In an exclusive interview with news agency IANS, Pitroda stated, "Our attitude has been one of confrontation from day one, and that attitude cre-

ates enemies. It also generates domestic support. I think we need to change this pattern and not assume China is the enemy from the outset." He further added, "I don't know what the threat from China is. I think it's often blown out of proportion because the U.S. tends to define an enemy."

Pitroda emphasized the importance of global collaboration, arguing that the future should be about communication, cooperation, and co-creation, rather than a "command and control" mindset. He noted, "China is around... China is growing, and we need to recognize and respect that. Every country will grow at different

rates. Those that are poorer will grow faster, while developed nations may experience slower growth and face an aging population."

The veteran Congress leader's remarks were in response to a question about whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump would be able to address threats from China. Pitroda highlighted that the focus should be on mutual respect and collaboration between nations rather than perceiving one another as enemies.

In reaction, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sharply criticized Pitroda's comments. BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari accused Pitroda of undermining India's national interests, referencing the 2008 Congress party's signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China. Bhandari claimed that Pitroda's remarks were part of a pattern where Congress prioritized China's interests over India's.

Pitroda's statements come after his reappointment as the chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, following a brief resignation last year amid another controversial podcast appearance.

AAP questions BJP's delay in naming Delhi CM, says party has 'no face' to run govt

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday launched a fresh attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over its delay in announcing a Chief Minister and cabinet for Delhi. Senior AAP leader and Delhi's acting Chief Minister, Atishi, accused the BJP of lacking a credible leader to govern the capital.

Speaking at a press conference, Atishi expressed frustration over the BJP's failure to declare its leadership despite the election results being announced ten days ago. "People expected the BJP to announce its chief minister and cabinet by February 9 and start developmental work immediately. But now it is clear that they have no face to run Delhi," she said.

Atishi further alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not trust any of the 48 BJP MLAs elected in Delhi. She claimed the party has no vision or plan for governance. "The BJP knows that all they will do is loot



the people of Delhi. If they don't have anyone capable of running the government, how will they work for the people?" she asked.

The delay in the BJP's decision to announce its leadership is seen as an embarrassment, especially after the party's decisive victory in the recent Delhi Assembly elections. The AAP's criticism comes at a time when political tensions between the two parties are escalating, with the BJP's inability to form a government fuelling further speculation about its internal leadership struggles.

As the political battle intensifies, Atishi's comments suggest that the AAP plans to continue highlighting the BJP's leadership vacuum, positioning the party's delay as a key issue in the ongoing debate over governance in Delhi.

BJP Targets Mayor's Post in Delhi's MCD After Defections from AAP



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The BJP is intensifying its efforts to capture the Mayor's post in Delhi's Municipal Corporation (MCD), aiming to weaken the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) hold on the capital. The saffron party has made significant strides by securing an equal number of councillors with AAP, after three AAP councillors joined the BJP on Saturday, bringing the count to 115-115.

BJP sources suggest that this is just the beginning, as they plan to engineer more defections before the Mayor elec-

tion in April. The BJP claims that several AAP councillors are disillusioned with their leadership and are willing to shift allegiances. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), with a total strength of 250, does not fall under the anti-defection law, making it easier for councillors to switch sides without facing legal consequences.

In the 2022 MCD elections, AAP won 134 wards, while the BJP secured 104, and Congress won nine. However, several vacancies have arisen since then, with 11 councillors having been elected as MLAs (eight from

BJP and three from AAP) and one BJP councillor becoming an MP. With the recent defections, the BJP now claims 132 votes, which includes 115 councillors, seven Lok Sabha MPs, and ten MLAs. Meanwhile, AAP holds 122 votes, significantly reducing its advantage.

As the race for the Mayor's post heats up, the BJP's strategic moves aim to capitalize on discontent among AAP councillors, shifting the political dynamics in Delhi. With the leadership tussle intensifying, the upcoming months will be crucial for both parties as they jostle for control of the MCD.

Rahul Gandhi Criticized for Using Banned Chinese Drone to Criticize India's Drone Policies

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi faced sharp backlash after using a banned Chinese drone to criticize the Indian government's drone policies. In a video released on Monday, Gandhi questioned the government's approach to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), sparking outrage from industry experts and stakeholders in India's burgeoning drone sector.

The criticism centers around Gandhi's use of a drone made by a Chinese company, which is banned under current Indian regulations. Experts argue that Gandhi's actions and his subsequent remarks undermine the significant strides India has made in developing its domestic drone industry, which includes contributions from over 400 Indian companies. These companies have been working to create a robust and self-sufficient drone manufacturing ecosystem in the country, a sector that has seen considerable growth in recent years.

Critics also raised concerns about the legality of flying a



banned drone in restricted zones. The use of such drones, especially in areas governed by tight security regulations, is not only a violation of national security laws but also contradicts the government's efforts to promote indigenous innovation in drone technology. Some observers questioned whether Gandhi had the necessary legal permissions to fly the drone in such zones.

Industry bodies, including the Drone Federation of India, expressed their disappointment over Gandhi's actions. They pointed out that his comments seemed to unfairly target the government's policies and undermine the efforts of

Indian drone manufacturers. According to experts, the development of India's drone sector has been supported by a strong regulatory framework and significant investment, both from the private sector and the government.

Despite the criticism, Gandhi's video sparked a broader debate about the future of drone technology in India and the government's approach to fostering innovation. While his remarks may have been intended to highlight flaws in policy, they have instead fueled concerns about national security and the impact of foreign-made drones on India's growing tech sector.

“Stay Alert For Possible Aftershocks”: PM Modi On Delhi Earthquake

- 4.0-magnitude quake jolts Delhi at 5:36 AM.
- PM Modi urges calm, officials monitor situation.
- No casualties reported; residents advised caution.

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

A 4.0-magnitude earthquake struck Delhi and surrounding areas early this morning, sending shockwaves through the national capital. In response to the tremors, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to social media to urge residents to “stay calm and follow the safety precautions.” He assured citizens that officials are closely monitoring the situation and working to ensure public safety.

According to the National Centre for Seismology, the earthquake occurred at 5:36 am, with the epicenter locat-

ed near Durgabai Deshmukh College of Special Education in Dhaula Kuan, Delhi. The quake was felt across various regions of the capital, including Noida, Greater Noida, and Ghaziabad, where many residents of high-rise buildings were seen rushing out in panic.

The tremors were accompanied by a loud sound, which, according to officials, is typical for shallow-focus earthquakes. The intensity of the vibrations left many in the city startled, with some describing it as a sudden and alarming jolt.

The Delhi Police, in a statement on social media, reassured the public with the message, “We hope you all are safe, Delhi!” They also urged citizens to contact the emergency helpline at 112 for any assistance.

While no immediate reports of casualties or significant damage have been confirmed, the earthquake served as a reminder of Delhi’s vulnerability to seismic activity, as the city lies within Seismic Zone IV. Authorities continue to assess the situation, and further updates will be provided as necessary.

As the region recovers from the tremors, local residents are advised to remain vigilant and follow the instructions of authorities to ensure their safety.



Enough Is Enough: Supreme Court Refuses New Pleas In Places Of Worship Case



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna expressed his displeasure during a hearing today over the growing number of petitions filed concerning the Places of Worship Act, 1991. The Act, which prevents any legal action to reclaim or alter the religious character of places of worship as they stood on August 15, 1947, has become the center of ongoing disputes, particularly related to temple-mosque issues.

CJI Khanna remarked, “Enough is enough. There has to be an end to this,” while emphasizing that the Supreme Court would no longer entertain new petitions on the matter. Despite this stern stance, the court allowed the filing of intervention petitions if they presented new grounds not previously raised, although it

refused to issue notices for the petitions already filed.

The Court’s remarks come amid the continued legal scrutiny of the Act’s validity, which is particularly significant as legal efforts intensify to reclaim Hindu temples that were allegedly demolished in the past. The original petition challenging the Act was filed by Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay. Last year, the Supreme Court had stayed proceedings in 18 lawsuits filed by Hindu parties seeking to reclaim mosques, including the Gyanvapi and Shahi Idgah mosques, as part of broader temple-mosque disputes.

The Places of Worship Act was passed in 1991 by the Congress-led government to maintain the status quo of religious places, prohibiting any attempt to change the re-

ligious identity of these sites. Notably, the Act does not apply to the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute.

Opposition parties, including the Congress and Asaduddin Owaisi’s AIMIM, have filed petitions asking the Supreme Court to enforce the law strictly, while Hindu groups and right-wing organizations have raised concerns about its implications. The Centre is yet to respond to petitions challenging the Act’s validity, and the Court awaits a reply from the government on the matter.

CJI Khanna’s remarks signal a significant shift in how the Court will handle new interventions, marking a decisive point in the ongoing legal battle over the Places of Worship Act.

Delhi’s Air Quality Remains Poor; Temperature Rises to 11.2°C



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Delhi’s air quality remained in the “poor” category on Monday, with marginal improvement observed in the early hours of the day. The Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 242 at 9 a.m., indicating a continued level of pollution. On Sunday, the AQI had reached 294 in the evening, further highlighting the city’s ongoing air quality challenges.

The capital’s minimum tem-

perature increased slightly, rising to 11.2°C on Monday compared to 9.9°C on Sunday. The rise in temperature marks a shift towards slightly warmer weather after a relatively cooler period.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Monday is expected to be another warm day with the maximum temperature likely to reach 30°C. On Saturday, the mercury had already touched 28.6°C, which was four degrees above the normal tempera-

ture for this time of year. The warmer temperatures are being influenced by a western disturbance affecting parts of northwest India, leading to partially cloudy skies in the region.

While the warmer temperatures provide a break from the chill, they also exacerbate the air pollution levels in Delhi, as the pollutants remain trapped in the atmosphere. The IMD also forecast light rain for Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) on Wednesday and Thursday, which may help improve the air quality by washing away some of the pollutants in the air.

As the weather continues to fluctuate, Delhiites are advised to take precautions against the poor air quality, especially those with respiratory issues. It remains to be seen whether the anticipated rainfall will bring any relief from both the pollution and the warmth.

New Delhi Railway Station Suspends Sale of Platform Tickets After Stampede

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

In response to the tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway Station on February 15, 2025, which resulted in the loss of 18 lives, the Railways has implemented new measures to manage crowd congestion. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Railways announced that the sale of platform tickets will be suspended from 4 pm to 11 pm for the next week at the station. This step is aimed at reducing overcrowding during peak hours, particularly as the station sees a significant influx of passengers due to the ongoing Mahakumbh festival.

The decision comes after Saturday’s stampede, which highlighted the severe crowd man-

agement challenges at the station. With the Mahakumbh nearing its conclusion on February 26, the station has been handling a substantial number of devotees and travelers, leading to a strain on the infrastructure. To address this, Indian Railways is working on crowd control and safety measures to avoid similar incidents.

In addition to the suspension of platform ticket sales, the Delhi Police has taken additional steps to improve safety. Six inspector-rank officers have been deployed at the station to oversee crowd management efforts and ensure the well-being of passengers. The increased presence of law enforcement will support efforts

to direct passengers to their designated platforms and prevent congestion.

Special trains, which have been running to accommodate the influx of Mahakumbh devotees, continue to operate, further adding to the passenger volume at the station. While the suspension of platform tickets will limit non-passenger access during peak hours, the authorities are hopeful that it will help alleviate the overcrowding issues.

The Ministry of Railways has also called on the public to cooperate with the authorities and adhere to the operational guidelines to ensure smoother movement of passengers and avoid future mishaps.



Adani Group Announces Rs 2,000 Crore Donation For Setting Up Schools

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Adani Group has announced a significant donation of Rs 2,000 crore for building at least 20 schools across India, continuing its philanthropic efforts following the wedding of Gautam Adani’s younger son. This is part of the larger Rs 10,000 crore commitment towards various social causes, which also includes Rs 6,000 crore for hospital construction and Rs 2,000 crore for skill development.

The Adani Foundation, in collaboration with GEMS Education, a global leader in K-12 private education, will spearhead the initiative. The focus of this partnership is to make world-class education accessible to children from all walks of life, ensuring affordability and high-quality learning infrastructure. The foundation aims to create “temples of education” throughout the country.



The first ‘Adani GEMS School of Excellence’ is set to open in Lucknow in the academic year 2025-26. Over the next three years, 20 more schools will be rolled out in major metropolitan cities and smaller Tier II to IV cities across India. The initiative will provide 30% of the seats in the CBSE curriculum for underserved and deserving children at no cost, further contributing to social inclusion.

Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group, emphasized the company’s dedication to making top-tier education affordable and accessible across

India. By integrating global best practices with innovative digital learning, the initiative aims to empower future leaders who are socially responsible and capable of driving change.

Sunny Varkey, Founder & Chairman of GEMS Education, expressed confidence that the collaboration with the Adani Foundation would strengthen their reach and impact, bringing global educational expertise to a diverse student population in India.

The Adani Foundation has been a key player in social welfare since 1996, operating in 6,769 villages across 19 states and focusing on education, health, sustainable livelihoods, and climate action. With this new initiative, the Adani Group continues its commitment to shaping a better future through strategic investments in youth and education.

No relief for Ranveer Allahbadia: summoned by Maharashtra Cyber Cell, to appear on Feb 24

TPN Correspondent
| Delhi

Maharashtra Cyber has summoned YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia for a hearing on February 24 in relation to the controversial remarks made during his appearance on the YouTube show India's Got Latent. In addition, comedian Samay Raina has been asked to appear before the cyber cell on February 18, following similar issues stemming from the show.

The controversy erupted when Allahbadia, also known as BeerBiceps, made a disturbing remark to a contestant, asking whether they would prefer to watch their parents engage in sexual activity for the rest of their lives or join them once to stop it. The statement sparked widespread outrage across social media platforms, leading to a case being filed against Allahbadia, Raina, and other judges involved in the show.

Raina had previously requested to record his statement virtually, citing his busy schedule with shows abroad. However, Maharashtra Cyber declined his request for video conferencing, and he is now required to appear in person on February 18.

In a related development, authorities had asked Raina to appear at the Khar police station by February 17 to provide his statement, but due to his international commitments,



- Hearing dates: Raina (Feb 18), Allahbadia (Feb 24).
- Assam police issue notices; action may follow

he could not attend. Similarly, Allahbadia had requested that his statement be recorded at his residence, a request that was also declined by the authorities.

Maharashtra Cyber has summoned nearly 50 individuals connected to the case, including participants in the show. A team from Assam police visited Mumbai to investigate the matter and issue notices to the accused at their residences. However, many individuals, including Allahbadia,

have yet to record their statements. As a result, the Assam police has issued notices under Section 35(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), requiring the accused to appear in Guwahati. If they fail to comply, the police may return to Mumbai to take further action.

The ongoing case has drawn considerable attention, and figures like rapper Badshah have publicly shown support for Samay Raina amid the controversy.

Tensions in Maharashtra Government as Fadnavis and Shinde Set Up Rival Offices



TPN Correspondent
| Maharashtra

Tensions between Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his counterpart Eknath Shinde appear to be growing, with both leaders establishing separate offices within the Mantralaya building, the state's secretariat. Fadnavis has set up an assistance desk and medical assistance desk on the seventh floor, which has become a central hub for monitoring key projects and meetings. Just a short distance away, Shinde has established his own medical assistance desk and coordination committee room to oversee major state projects.

When questioned about the developments, Fadnavis downplayed the situation, emphasizing that there was nothing wrong with the arrangement. He compared it to his previous experience as Deputy Chief

Minister when his office was located next to Shinde's. Fadnavis assured that the government is functioning smoothly despite the apparent power divide.

However, leaders from Shinde's Shiv Sena have voiced support for the separate offices, arguing that the presence of two distinct centers of authority could speed up decision-making and improve public welfare. They believe that the duplication of efforts could expedite state projects and lead to more efficient governance.

Earlier, Shinde had expressed dissatisfaction over his exclusion from the Disaster Management Committee, a move that prompted new rules to include him in the panel. Furthermore, unresolved disputes over the appointment of guardian ministers for Raigad and Nashik districts have add-

ed to the strain, with Fadnavis halting the appointments after a revolt by Shinde's MLAs.

The power struggle within the ruling Mahayuti alliance, which comprises the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena, and the Ajit Pawar faction of the NCP, has raised concerns. Despite securing a landslide victory in the 2022 Maharashtra Assembly elections, with the alliance winning 230 out of 288 seats, there are persistent signs of unease, particularly over the allocation of power and resources.

While both Fadnavis and Shinde publicly deny any rift and insist that the government is running smoothly, speculation about Shinde's frustration over not becoming Chief Minister continues to persist, adding fuel to the ongoing tensions.

Bihar: Internet cut in Jamui after clash over religious procession



TPN Correspondent | Bihar

A violent clash broke out between two communities during a religious procession in Bihar's Jamui district on Sunday, resulting in three injuries and the suspension of internet services in the area. The incident occurred in Jhajha, a town in Jamui, when members of both communities resorted to stone-throwing, escalating the situation. The violence prompted a heavy police deployment and a flag march on Monday to prevent further unrest.

According to Jamui District Magistrate Abhilasha Sharma, the clash led to injuries to three individuals. In response to the violence, nine people were arrested, and a police official was suspended for dereliction of duty. The injured were promptly taken to a government hospital, where their condition was reported to be stable and out of danger.

The police have registered a case against 50-60 unidenti-

fied individuals involved in the stone-throwing incident. In an effort to maintain peace, the district police carried out a flag march in Jhajha on Monday to demonstrate a strong law enforcement presence and prevent the situation from escalating further.

Authorities acted swiftly to control the situation, and the local government implemented an internet shutdown to curb the spread of rumors and maintain public order. The incident has raised concerns over communal tensions in the region, as the two communities involved in the clash have a history of friction.

As investigations continue, officials are working to restore peace in the district. The clash serves as a reminder of the challenges authorities face in managing communal harmony during sensitive religious events, with local law enforcement now focusing on maintaining stability in the aftermath of the violence.

Suresh K Reddy Appointed as India's New Ambassador to Egypt

TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

Suresh K Reddy, a seasoned diplomat from the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), has been appointed as India's Ambassador to Egypt, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Monday. Reddy, currently serving as India's envoy to Brazil, is a 1991 IFS batch officer with an illustrious career spanning several countries and key diplomatic roles.

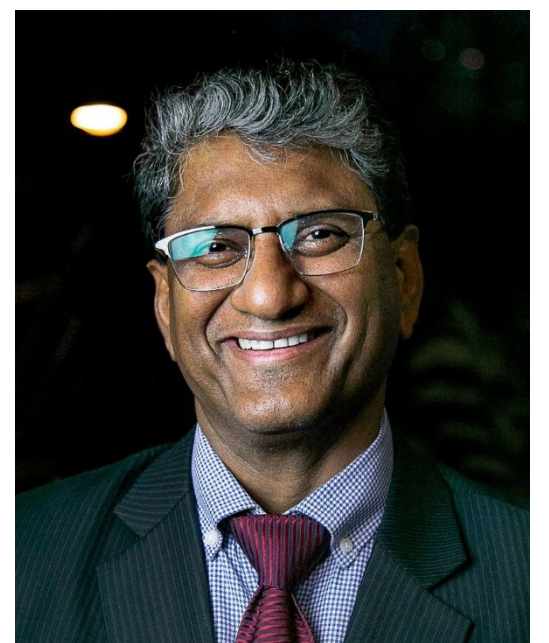
Reddy has had a distinguished career, with his first overseas posting in Cairo. His extensive experience includes serving in Muscat, Abu Dhabi, and Islamabad, followed by his appointment as India's Ambassador to Iraq and ASEAN. He also served as the Special Envoy of the Government of India to Iraq in 2014, where he addressed issues related to the safety, welfare, and evacuation of Indian nationals during a critical period.

Within the MEA, Reddy has held significant positions. Notably, he served as the Head of the Office of the Minister of State

for External Affairs, where he dealt with matters related to India's relations with neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. His expertise also extended to regional cooperation, as he played a key role in the establishment of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Secretariat.

Reddy's contributions to India's foreign relations extended to multilateral forums as well. He headed the ASEAN Multilateral Economic Relations Division, working on initiatives like ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting), ACD (Asia Cooperation Dialogue), and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). His leadership was also instrumental when he headed the Multilateral Economic Relations Division between December 2018 and January 2020.

In addition, Reddy represented India as the Sous Sherpa to the G20, G7, BRICS, and IBSA. In January 2020, he took on the role of Additional Secretary (Europe), where



he coordinated India's diplomatic engagements with Europe and Central Asia. With his broad expertise and extensive diplomatic experience, Reddy's appointment to Egypt underscores his critical role in shaping India's foreign policy.

ED conducts multi-state raids in cough syrup drugs case; nabs 2 NCB accused

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted a series of raids across several northern states and Jammu and Kashmir on February 13, leading to the seizure of cash and jewellery worth Rs 2 crore. The raids were part of an ongoing investigation into an illicit drug trade case involving Codeine-Based Cough Syrup (CB) and its unauthorized distribution. During the operation, the ED also apprehended two individuals wanted in a drugs case registered by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).

The case centers on the diversion and illegal sale of Cocrex, a cough syrup brand, which was procured without authorization from its manufacturer, Vidit Health-

care, located in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh. The managing partner of Vidit Healthcare, Neeraj Bhatia, who is based in Panipat, Haryana, is alleged to have



played a role in the illicit activities. The cough syrup was diverted from the manufacturer and sold through "shell" com-

panies, including S S Industries in Faridabad, owned by Sumesh Sareen, and other entities like N K Pharmaceuticals, Kansal Pharmaceuticals, and Kansal Industries, which were reportedly controlled by the Kansal family from Delhi.

The ED's probe revealed that between 2018 and 2024, these companies were involved in the unauthorized procurement and distribution of the cough syrup, a controlled substance. The syrup, which contains Codeine, a narcotic, was being distributed for illegal sale, posing serious health and legal risks. The operation targeted individuals and networks behind the illicit trade, including Garv Bhambhari, an accomplice involved in the illegal operations based in Faridabad.

President's Rule in Manipur: A Political Move, Not a Solution to the Crisis



The imposition of President's Rule in Manipur by the Union Government has sparked debate over its true motivations. While some see it as a necessary step to restore peace and constitutional order, others view it as a political maneuver aimed at protecting the BJP's interests, rather than addressing the root causes of the ongoing crisis. The violence in Manipur, which erupted on May 3, 2023, has led to significant loss of lives and property. Despite the deployment of over 60,000 central troops and law enforcement agencies, the situation has remained volatile. Yet, the Prime Minister has downplayed the severity of the violence, even claiming that the situation is "normal," and the state is functioning as usual. This contrasts sharply with the experiences on the

ground, where residents continue to endure suffering and uncertainty. BJP's internal divisions have also played a role in this political crisis. Chief Minister N Biren Singh, once seen as a loyal ally to the Union government, faced mounting criticism from his party members due to his handling of the lawlessness in the state. While the Union government claimed to work closely with Singh, it became apparent that Delhi was taking control of key decisions, including the appointment of the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police, without consulting the state leadership. Singh himself admitted that central agencies were often bypassing his authority, indicating a breakdown in governance at the state level.

Amid growing resentment, the BJP leadership in Delhi pushed for Singh's resignation, fearing a possible loss in the upcoming elections if the current situation continued. However, the party could not agree on a suitable replacement, leading to the imposition of President's Rule. Critics argue that this move is an attempt to divert attention from the BJP's failures in handling the crisis and the suffering of the people of Manipur. For true accountability and a resolution to the crisis, a Joint Parliamentary Committee should be formed to thoroughly examine the multiple dimensions of the Manipur tragedy. Only through this process, rather than the political expediency of President's Rule, can justice be delivered to the people of Manipur.

Qatar Emir's India Visit: A Strategic Imperative Beyond Diplomatic Pleasantries



The state visit of Qatar's Emir, Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, to India, beginning February 17, 2025, marks a significant diplomatic moment, but beyond the formalities and pleasantries, it highlights deeper strategic interests that shape this important bilateral relationship. With India's increasing geopolitical influence in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, the relationship with Qatar is becoming more pivotal, not just in terms of energy but also regional stability and economic cooperation. India-Qatar ties are underpinned by deep historical and economic roots. A significant part of Qatar's workforce—around 830,000—comprises Indians, playing a vital role in driving the country's economy. These expatriates contribute across various sectors, from construction and healthcare to technology, making them indispensable to Qatar's growth. Their expertise, along with their substantial remittances—approximately \$4.143 billion annually—shows the significance of this demographic to both countries. In addition to people-to-people ties, Qatar is a reliable supplier of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to India. This energy partnership has been central to the relationship, providing India with affordable and stable energy. However, with India diversifying its energy sources, especially increasing imports from the United States, questions arise about Qatar's future role in India's energy landscape. While the

country remains an important partner, India must navigate this evolving energy dynamic cautiously, mindful of not taking Qatar's generosity for granted. Furthermore, India's engagement with Qatar goes beyond trade and energy. The resolution of the diplomatic crisis involving eight former Indian Navy officials, sentenced to death in Qatar, demonstrated India's strategic leverage. Prime Minister Modi's personal intervention underscored the importance of high-level diplomatic relations with Qatar, which also signed long-term LNG deals with India despite the European gas scramble. As India strengthens its ties with the broader GCC region, Qatar's strategic importance remains paramount. With the focus shifting to emerging sectors like renewable energy, fintech, and infrastructure, India's relationship with Qatar will likely continue to evolve beyond traditional energy partnerships. However, challenges such as regional instability, labor rights issues, and tensions in the Israel-Hamas conflict require ongoing, nuanced dialogue. In conclusion, India-Qatar relations are increasingly complex, intertwined with energy security, regional geopolitics, and economic collaboration. As India's influence in the Gulf grows, it must continue to nurture this critical relationship with Qatar, ensuring mutual benefits while addressing regional and global challenges.

New Delhi Station Stampede Highlights Urgent Need for Railway Modernization

On February 15, 2025, a tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway Station claimed the lives of at least 18 people and injured many others. This incident has once again brought attention to the perennial problem of overcrowding at the station, which, despite being the busiest in India, continues to operate at outdated capacity levels. While the standard rituals—condolences from the government, compensation for the victims, and the announcement of a high-level inquiry—have been swiftly completed, the underlying issue remains unaddressed: the lack of modern infrastructure at one of the most critical transport hubs in the country.

The Growing Traffic Surge and Its Risks

New Delhi station is not just the busiest station in India; it generates the highest passenger revenue, accounting for over Rs 3,337 crore in 2023-24. However, the station's infrastructure, which opened in 1955, has not been upgraded to handle the ever-growing number of passengers. Officially, the station's capacity reached its limit by 2000, with daily traffic hovering around 500,000 passengers. This is in stark contrast to the current numbers, where the station regularly handles between 7 to 8 lakh passengers during peak seasons, causing congestion that can turn hazardous in a heartbeat.

Despite the seasonal surge in passenger traffic being predictable, Indian Railways (IR) continues to rely on rudimentary measures to manage this influx. As the recent stampede tragically demonstrated, the lack of adequate infrastructure to handle surges leaves passengers vulnerable, and this vulnerability will only increase as the number of rail users continues to rise.

A Long Delayed Modernization Plan

The need for New Delhi station's modernization has been apparent for over two decades. The first attempt to modernize the station was conceived in the early 2000s, around the same time as the modernization of Delhi's international airport. In 2007, a design was finalized by the renowned architecture firm Farrells, with the plan to increase station capacity, improve amenities, and create a new urban space above the railway tracks. Despite this ambitious plan, it never came to fruition due to delays, opposition from local authorities, and failed tenders. The first failed attempt came in 2008, with confusion surrounding tender clauses, followed by another cancellation in 2009 due to bureaucratic



hurdles. A third attempt in 2022 saw a scaled-back version of the original plan, but that, too, failed when the winning bidder, L&T, quoted over Rs 8,000 crore, exceeding the government's estimate of Rs 5,000 crore.

In 2023, Indian Railways reduced the scope of work further and attempted to launch the project on a smaller scale, yet the tender was withdrawn in early 2024. The Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) has since fragmented the project into smaller tenders in hopes of attracting more bidders, but as of now, the modernization effort remains stalled.

Effective Measures to Prevent Future Accidents

While the tragic stampede at New Delhi Station highlights the urgency of modernization, it is also a reminder that such incidents can be prevented with the right measures. Here are some strategies that can be adopted to manage the surge in passenger traffic:

- **Optimizing Platform Capacity:** This involves increasing the number of platforms and utilizing space more efficiently to accommodate more trains and passengers.

- **Technology-Based Solutions:** Implementing smart ticketing systems, AI-based crowd management tools, and real-time passenger flow tracking can help manage congestion.
- **Improved Signage and Barriers:** Clear and visible signage to direct passenger movement can reduce chaos, especially during peak hours. Barriers can be used to separate different streams of passenger flow.
- **Adequate Staffing:** Adequate staff presence at critical locations, including ticket counters, platforms, and gates, is essential for maintaining order and directing passengers effectively.
- **Coordination with Train Schedules:** Well-coordinated train schedules during peak times can reduce overcrowding on platforms and in trains.
- **Crowd Control Measures:** Barriers, ropes, and entry/exit points should be designed to channel passengers in a way that prevents overcrowding, especially at entry and exit points.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Stations should have well-established emergency re-

sponse protocols, with staff trained to handle crises efficiently.

- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Finally, upgrading station infrastructure to handle the increased traffic and to provide adequate facilities for passengers is key to preventing such accidents.

New Delhi Railway Station stands as a symbol of India's growth in terms of rail passenger traffic, but its outdated infrastructure is a stark reminder of how critical modernization efforts can be in preventing avoidable tragedies. As the busiest station in the country, it is inconceivable that New Delhi Railway Station is still grappling with capacity issues, especially when its modernization plan has been on the table for over 20 years. The failure of successive efforts to upgrade the station is a reflection of the inefficiencies within Indian Railways, and the recent stampede should serve as a wake-up call for both the government and the railway authorities. If such accidents are to be avoided in the future, New Delhi Station's modernization needs to move beyond planning stages into actionable, urgent steps—before another tragedy strikes.

India Can Turn "Fast Fashion" Waste Into Opportunity: PM Modi At Bharat Tex 2025

- Modi urges textile industry to upcycle waste.
- India's recycling market may hit \$400M.
- Bharat Tex 2025 hosts 120+ countries.



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the gathering at Bharat Tex 2025 on Sunday evening, emphasizing the need for India's textile industry to turn the challenge of "fast fashion waste" into an opportunity. He highlighted the importance of maximizing resource use and minimizing waste generation in the sector. The Prime Minister pointed out that millions of garments are discarded each month due to changing fashion trends, creating significant environmental concerns. He also noted that by 2030, fashion waste could reach 148 million tons, with less than a quarter currently being recycled.

PM Modi suggested that India's rich traditional skills in textile

recycling and upcycling could address this issue. He cited examples from Maharashtra, where old fabrics are transformed into mats, rugs, and quilts. The Prime Minister encouraged innovation in these practices, which could help tap into global market opportunities. He announced that the Textile Ministry had signed a MoU with the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises and e-Marketplace to promote upcycling, with several up-cyclers already registered.

PM Modi projected that India's textile recycling market could grow to USD 400 million in the next few years, while the global recycled textile market is expected to reach USD 7.5 billion. He expressed confidence that India could capture a larger share of this market.

Reflecting on India's prosperous past, where the textile industry played a crucial role, the Prime Minister reiterated that as the country strives towards becoming a Viksit Bharat, the textile sector would again be pivotal. He lauded Bharat Tex as a strong platform for global engagement, collaboration, and partnership, with over 120 countries participating in the event.

He also urged the banking sector to support textile entrepreneurs, fostering business growth and job creation. Bharat Tex 2025, held at Bharat Mandapam from February 14-17, is one of the largest events of its kind, showcasing the entire textile ecosystem and providing a platform for innovation and collaboration.

Gyanesh Kumar Likely to Become India's Next Chief Election Commissioner

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Gyanesh Kumar, who was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March of last year, is set to replace Rajiv Kumar as the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, sources told NDTV on Monday evening. If confirmed, Mr. Kumar will oversee the conduct of several crucial elections, including the Bihar Assembly election later this year, as well as elections in Bengal, Assam, and Tamil Nadu next year.



Mr. Kumar, a 1988-batch IAS officer from the Kerala cadre, is currently the senior-most commissioner on the three-member Election Commission panel, which was previously led by Rajiv Kumar. The other commissioner on the panel is Sukhbir Singh Sandhu from the Uttarakhand cadre. However, Mr. Kumar's appointment has yet to be formally ratified.

The Congress party has raised objections to the swift move to appoint a new CEC, pointing out that the Supreme Court is set to hear a challenge to the 2023 law that governs the selection process. Critics of the law argue that it allows the ruling BJP to have control over the CEC appointment, with the process being decided by a three-member panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kumar, 61, has held several key positions in the Indian civil services. Prior to his appointment as Election Commissioner, he was part of the Union Home Ministry, where he played a crucial role in drafting the bill that scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. He was also responsible for handling key documents related to the Supreme Court case on the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Additionally, he is known to have a close relationship

with Home Minister Amit Shah.

Before retiring in January last year, Mr. Kumar served as the Secretary of the Ministry of Cooperation, a position also overseen by Amit Shah. He has previously held roles in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and the Defence Ministry during the Congress-led UPA government. Mr. Kumar holds a B.Tech in Civil Engineering from the Indian Institute of Engineering in Kanpur, along with degrees in Business Finance and Environmental Economics from the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India and Harvard University, respectively.

Rajiv Kumar, the outgoing Chief Election Commissioner, stepped down this morning after a tenure marked by efforts to modernize the election process. In his farewell speech, Mr. Kumar emphasized the importance of innovations such as remote voting for NRIs and migrant workers, biometric voting systems, and safeguarding against post-poll violence by ensuring the non-disclosure of votes. He also highlighted the need for greater financial transparency in election campaign expenses and the growing role of Artificial Intelligence in the future of elections.



To Ban or Not to Ban: Alcohol Divides J&K's Political Landscape

TPN Correspondent | Assam

The ruling National Conference (NC) in Jammu and Kashmir is facing significant criticism for its change of stance on the issue of liquor sales in the region. The NC's volte-face has sparked a backlash, especially from political and religious figures, as well as civil society groups. The controversy revolves around the Bills to be introduced in the upcoming assembly session, which seek to ban the sale and consumption of liquor in Jammu and Kashmir.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chairman of the Moderate Hurriyat, condemned NC leader Tanvir Sadiq's defense of liquor sales, which he justified under the pretext of boosting tourism. Mirwaiz, speaking at an interfaith event in Budgam district on February 16, questioned the morality of such a move in a Muslim-majority region, emphasizing the harm caused to society by drug abuse. He criticized the NC for ignoring the example of other Indian states, such as Gujarat, where alcohol is banned and tourism continues to thrive.

Sadiq had earlier argued that liquor sales should be allowed to support tourism, noting that several countries in the Arab world permit alcohol for tourists. He insisted that the local stakeholders, including travel agents, should be consulted before taking any drastic steps.

However, Mirwaiz dismissed this argument, pointing out that no consultation had been held with the stakeholders of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the issue. Opposition parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), also expressed their disapproval, arguing that linking tourism to alcohol sales is flawed. PDP leader Waheed Parra pointed to Gujarat's success as a dry state, where tourism has flourished without the need for liquor sales.

In the upcoming legislative session, at least three private member Bills will be introduced, seeking a ban on alcohol in Jammu and Kashmir. These Bills have garnered support from various quarters, including BJP leader Darakhshan Andrabi, who welcomed the move as a step toward protecting the youth from drug abuse.

The ongoing debate reflects the deepening divide over the future of alcohol sales in Jammu and Kashmir, with strong opinions from both sides of the political spectrum.

CM Stalin Slam Pradhan For Forcing Tamil Nadu to Adopt Three-Language Formula

TPN Correspondent | Tamilnadu

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has accused Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan of "blackmail" after the latter stated that Tamil Nadu would not receive funds under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan unless it accepts the National Education Policy (NEP) and the controversial three-language formula. Stalin expressed his displeasure over Pradhan's comments, asserting that Tamil Nadu's rightful due for educational funds should not be contingent on political conditions.

Stalin posted a video of Pradhan speaking on social media, stating that the Union Minister's remarks were disrespectful and threatening, warning that Tamil Nadu might show Delhi the "real trait" of its people in response. The Chief Minister's comment resonated with opposition parties across Tamil Nadu, who strongly criticized the Union government's stance on this issue.

Edappadi K. Palaniswami, General Secretary of AIADMK and Leader of the Opposition in Tamil Nadu, also condemned the central government's decision. He remarked that the Centre's refusal to release funds based on Tamil Nadu's rejection of the three-language policy was unjust. Palaniswami emphasized that Tamil Nadu had been a pioneer in the field of education and that the Centre should focus on the welfare of the people, not the political leaders in power.

The stance was echoed by Seeman, the chief of the Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), who criticized the NEP's push to make Hindi mandatory. He argued that while the people of Tamil Nadu could choose to learn Hindi, the Centre should not impose the language on them. Seeman expressed that India's unity lies in its linguistic diversity and that Tamil Nadu's opposition to the NEP should not result in withholding educational funds.

The controversy highlights the growing tensions between the state and central governments over educational policies, with Tamil Nadu leaders continuing to reject the imposition of Hindi and the three-language policy.



Assam CM Orders Probe into Alleged Pakistani Links of Gaurav Gogoi's Wife

TPN Correspondent | Guwahati



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has ordered a case against a Pakistani national, Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, for allegedly attempting to interfere in domestic matters in Assam and India. Sarma also revealed that Elizabeth Colburn, the wife of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, will be investigated for her alleged ties to Pakistan and its intelligence agency, ISI.

Sarma's decision came after a cabinet meeting on Sunday, where he cited reports of Sheikh's online activities and his connections with Colburn. According to Sarma, Sheikh, who founded LEAD Pakistan, a non-profit organization focused on climate change, has had direct contact with Colburn, who was involved with the organization during her time in Islamabad. Both Sheikh and Colburn were part of the global climate action group, the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), which operates in both India and Pakistan.

Sarma raised concerns over the national security implications of the situation, particularly given Assam's historical vulnerabilities to destabilization by Pakistani actors. The Chief Minister also pointed out that Colburn, a British citizen, allegedly campaigned for Gogoi during two Lok Sabha elections, which would be a violation of visa norms. Sarma questioned the appropriateness of a foreign national participating in Indian elections, especially given her potential involvement in sensitive issues raised by her husband in Parliament, including nuclear radars and uranium mines.

Gaurav Gogoi, in response, dismissed the accusations as "dirty and baseless" politics and rejected the charges as "laughable and entertaining." He stated that his focus remains on improving Assam's economy, education, and healthcare policies, and expressed frustration with the ongoing political drama.

Sarma has called for a thorough investigation, involving central agencies, into the allegations against Colburn and Sheikh, stressing the importance of national security. He plans to share all relevant documents with Congress leaders to verify the facts.

UK willing to 'put own troops on ground' in Ukraine if needed: PM Starmer

- UK PM Starmer open to deploying troops to Ukraine.
- Trump-Putin talks raise concerns in Europe.
- Zelenskyy calls for a European army.



TPN Correspondent | UK

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed on Monday that he was prepared to send British troops to Ukraine "if necessary," highlighting a shift in European security discussions following the changing stance of the United States under President Donald Trump. Starmer's comments come in the context of Trump's recent talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which have raised concerns about Europe's security and Ukraine's future.

While Trump prepares for a meeting with Putin, reportedly to discuss peace negoti-

ations, European leaders, including Starmer, have been intensifying efforts to address the continent's security needs. Starmer described the situation as a "once-in-a-generation moment," emphasizing that any role in supporting Ukraine's security directly contributes to the security of Europe and the UK. "Helping to guarantee Ukraine's security is helping to guarantee the security of our continent, and the security of this country," Starmer remarked, underlining the urgency of collective European defense.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also called for the establishment of a Europe-

an army, believing that such an institution could reduce Europe's dependence on US security guarantees. Zelenskyy's plea came amid growing concerns about the US pivoting its focus away from Europe, as indicated by Trump's stance on NATO and his previous comments about Russia's desire to end the war in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, a key meeting in Paris, scheduled ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, will gather leaders from several European nations including the UK, Germany, and Poland, as well as EU officials like Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

The meeting will focus on Ukraine's situation and broader European security issues.

The ongoing diplomatic tension has also been exacerbated by the Kremlin's push for negotiations between the US and Russia, which could shape the future of Europe's defense strategy. EU nations remain concerned that Russia might demand a return to pre-2022 positions, including limiting NATO's presence in Eastern Europe. As Europe grapples with these uncertainties, Starmer's willingness to deploy UK troops signals the UK's commitment to the security of Ukraine and the broader continent.

Myanmar frees 1,000 scam center workers as crackdown widens



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

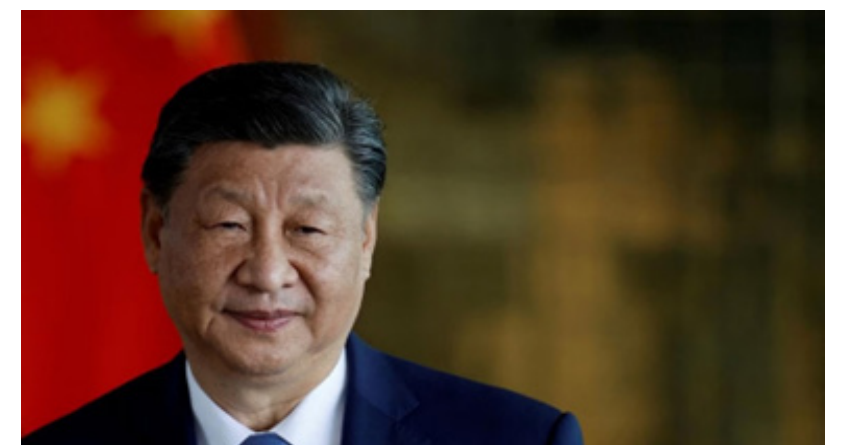
Myanmar's military government announced it is ready to hand over around 1,000 foreign nationals who were rescued from cyber scam centers near the Thai border. The victims, mostly from Asia and East Africa, were trafficked or tricked into working at these illicit centers. Myanmar authorities have vowed to intensify efforts to combat transnational criminal groups responsible for the operations.

Over the past three weeks, approximately 1,030 foreign nationals have been rescued from these scam centers, which are believed to be involved in online fraud. The Myanmar government has already repatriated 61 of the victims to their home countries, while the remaining individuals are set to be returned in the coming days, according to a statement from the State Administration Council, Myanmar's ruling military body.

The majority of the victims come from Asian countries, including China and India, although some are from East Africa. The victims were reportedly coerced or deceived into participating in online scams, where they were forced to defraud people across the globe. Many of the centers were located near the border with Thailand, a region notorious for transnational human trafficking and cybercrime activities.

The military junta launched a large-scale operation to combat online scams and human trafficking following mounting pressure from neighboring countries like Thailand and China. The high-profile trafficking of a Chinese actor, which highlighted the scale of criminal activities in the region, spurred Myanmar to take action.

The recent operation is part of a broader effort to dismantle criminal networks operating across Myanmar's borders. The government has promised to continue its crackdown on these illegal operations, although human rights organizations have raised concerns about the safety and treatment of the victims during the rescue and repatriation process. Myanmar's actions come amid growing regional concerns over the rise of cybercrime and human trafficking in Southeast Asia.



Xi Jinping Urges Chinese Entrepreneurs to Boost Confidence Amid Economic Slowdown

TPN Correspondent | Beijing

On Monday, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a rare meeting with top business leaders, including Alibaba founder Jack Ma, Xiaomi's Lei Jun, Tencent's Pony Ma Huateng, and BYD's Wang Chuanfu, to address concerns over China's slowing economy and the challenges facing private enterprises. The meeting, a symposium on private enterprises, aimed to restore business confidence amid uncertainties, both domestically and internationally.

This gathering came at a time of growing concern about the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, particularly with his plans to raise tariffs on Chinese exports. China's GDP growth has also slowed to around 5 percent in recent years, further intensifying worries among entrepreneurs and business leaders about the future of the economy.

During the symposium, President Xi emphasized that the current moment presents a significant opportunity for private enterprises to unleash their full potential. He urged the business leaders to reach a consensus and strengthen their confidence to contribute to the healthy and high-quality development of China's private sector. Xi reassured the attendees that the government's policies regarding the private economy remain firmly embedded within China's socialist system and would not change.

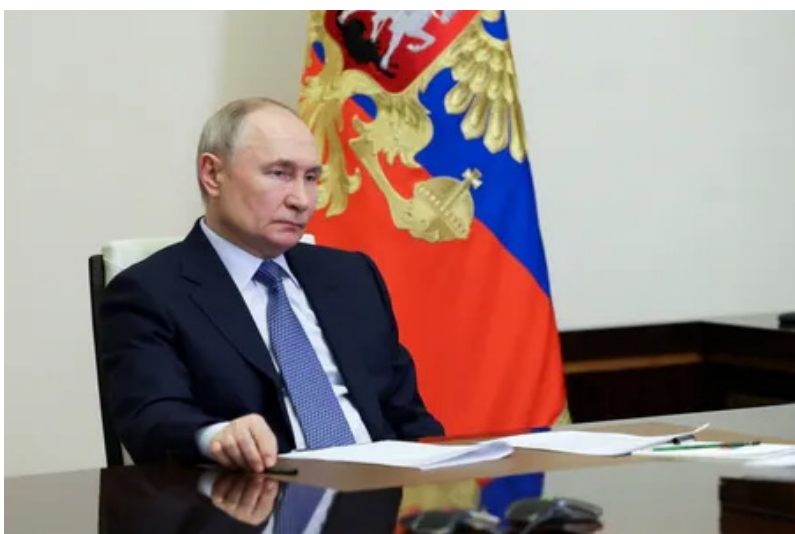
The meeting comes after a period of tension between Jack Ma and the Chinese Communist Party, following Ma's outspoken criticism of China's regulatory system. The fact that Ma was present at this high-profile meeting signals a potential shift in relations between China's government and its private business leaders, especially as the country faces ongoing economic challenges.

Russia, US to hold talks on Feb 18 in Saudi Arabia on restoring ties

TPN Correspondent | Washington

The Kremlin announced on Monday that top Russian officials will meet with their US counterparts in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to discuss restoring relations between the two nations and the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is approaching its third year.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Yuri Ushakov, a senior foreign policy advisor to President Vladimir Putin, are scheduled to participate in the talks with US officials in Riyadh. According to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, the primary focus of the meeting will be on revitalizing the broader scope of US-Russia relations, which have been severely strained since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine.



Peskov also stated that the talks will address preparations for possible peace negotiations concerning Ukraine, though he did not provide further specifics on potential outcomes. The Kremlin had previously hinted at discussions surrounding a peace settlement, but the details have remained unclear.

Regarding the potential deployment of European troops to Ukraine following a possible peace deal, Peskov referred to the issue as a "complex question," which has not yet been thoroughly discussed. This issue remains a point of contention among international actors as the war continues to

devastate the region.

Lavrov and Ushakov are scheduled to fly to Riyadh on Monday ahead of the high-stakes meeting. The Kremlin's announcement of these talks comes amid growing international pressure for negotiations to end the war, which has caused immense suffering and geopolitical instability since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

As the conflict enters its third year, the meeting in Saudi Arabia represents a crucial moment for diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions and possibly finding a path to peace. The outcome of the discussions could significantly impact the future of US-Russia relations and the broader international response to the war in Ukraine.

Kim Jong Un Visits Father's Mausoleum, Pledges Commitment to 'Sacred Struggle'

TPN Correspondent | North Korea

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a rare visit to the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang on Monday to mark the birthday of his late father, Kim Jong Il. This significant visit, which came on February 16—celebrated annually as the Day of the Shining Star—was the first in four years for Kim Jong Un to pay his respects at the mausoleum, where the embalmed bodies of his father and grandfather, Kim Il Sung, are housed.

Accompanied by his sister, Kim Yo Jong, a senior official in the ruling Workers' Party, and other aides, Kim Jong Un paid homage to his family's legacy in what state media de-



scribed as "the humblest reverence." The state news agency KCNA reported that Kim expressed his deep commitment to the country's future, vowing to continue the "sacred struggle" to ensure the prosperity, security, and well-being of the North Korean people.

Kim Jong Il's birthday is con-

sidered one of North Korea's most important holidays, and it is marked by various ceremonies and celebrations. This year's observance coincides with heightened political tensions on the Korean Peninsula, as Kim Jong Un continues to solidify his leadership amid ongoing regional and international challenges.

In his remarks during the visit, Kim Jong Un pledged to honor the legacy of his father and grandfather by working towards North Korea's continued advancement and stability. His statement underscored the importance of maintaining the "sacred struggle" for the eternal prosperity of the nation, as well as the security of its citizens. This rare appearance at the family mausoleum is viewed as a symbolic gesture of continuity in leadership and North Korea's political ideology. The visit highlights Kim Jong Un's role in upholding the Kim family's dynastic rule and his determination to preserve the country's political and military priorities amidst ongoing challenges on the global stage.

Stock Markets Rebound After Eight-Day Losing Streak, Banking and Pharma Lead Recovery



The eight-session losing streak came to an end. The indices gained today. The indices, which started with heavy losses in the morning, recovered after the afternoon due to mixed signals from global markets. As expected, a counter rally took place. Investors bought fundamentally strong shares. Bank, pharma and healthcare shares also supported this. With this, the Nifty, which traded in a loss of more than 180 points in the morning, finally ended with a gain of 30 points. The

Sensex also followed the same path.

The BSE Sensex, which closed at 75,939 in the previous session, started at 75,641 on Monday. It touched an intraday low at 75,294. It reached an intraday high at 76,041. It finally closed at 75,996 with a gain of 57 points. The NSE Nifty, which opened at 22,809, touched a low of 22,725 and a high of 22,974. It closed at 22,959, up 30 points.



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The Nifty Bank rose 159 points to settle at 49,258.

In the Nifty50, 34 companies gained while 16 lost. Adani Enterprises, Bajaj Finserv, IndusInd Bank, Adani Ports were the top gainers. Mahindra & Mahindra, Airtel, Infi, TCS, ICI- CI Bank were the top losers. Pharma, healthcare, bank, finance, metal indices rose. Auto, FMCG, IT, media indices were mixed. India VIX rose 4.71% to 15.72.

Market breadth on NSE today was completely in favour of sellers. Out of 2955 shares traded, only 1014 gained. 1871 lost. 22 shares touched 52-week highs. 747 shares touched 52-week lows.

Rupee settled at 86.87 against the dollar. Jefferies has given a buy rating to Samvardhan Motherson with a target price of Rs.165. Singtel is looking to sell Airtel worth billions of dollars. Nomura has given a neutral rating to Glenmark with a target price of Rs.1500. Quality Power Electric IPO received a response of

0.79 times by the afternoon of the second day. LTI Mindtree partners with Eurobank for multi-year banking. Borosil Renewables shares hit 5% lower circuit as losses widen in third quarter. Cyient DLM wins avionics manufacturing award from Thales. Motilal Oswal gives neutral rating to United Breweries with a target price of Rs 2000. Antony Waste EBITA rises 21.5%. Nomura gives buy rating to Mahindra & Mahindra with a target price of Rs 3681. CLSA maintains buy rating on Hindalco Industries with a target price of Rs 815.

Ashok Leyland Limited (ASHOKLEY):



Ashok Leyland is a leading commercial vehicle manufacturer in India, producing trucks, buses, and light vehicles. The company has a strong market presence and has been focusing on expanding its product portfolio and increasing exports.

Aarti Pharmalabs Limited (AARTIPHARM):



Aarti Pharmalabs specializes in the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and intermediates. In Q3 FY2024-2025, the company reported a net profit of ₹73.99 crore, a 40.24% increase compared to the same period last year. This growth is attributed to enhanced operational efficiencies and a diversified product portfolio.

Kaveri Seed Company Limited (KSCL):

Kaveri Seed Company is one of India's largest agricultural seed companies, offering a wide range of hybrid seeds for crops like cotton, maize, and paddy. The company has a robust research and development division, focusing on developing high-yielding and disease-resistant seed varieties.



Jubilant Pharmova Limited (JUBLPHARMA):

Jubilant Pharmova operates in the pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors, providing a range of products and services, including APIs, contract manufacturing, and drug discovery solutions. The company em-



phasizes innovation and has a global presence, catering to various markets worldwide.

Castrol India Limited (CASTROLIND):

Castrol India is a prominent player in the lubricants industry, offering a wide array of automotive and industrial lubricant products. The company has a strong distribution network and focuses on continuous product innovation to meet the evolving needs of consumers.



Income tax relief should not be seen as govt shifting focus from capex: Sitharaman

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday clarified that the substantial income tax relief announced in Budget 2025 does not signal a shift in the government's focus from capital expenditure to boosting consumption. This clarification comes after debates emerged over the decision to keep individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually out of the income tax net, particularly following tepid GDP growth figures over two consecutive quarters. During a post-budget interaction with stakeholders in Mumbai, Sitharaman emphasized that the government's commitment to capital expenditure (capex) remains strong. She noted that the allocation for capex in the 2025 Budget is over 10.2% higher than last year, amounting to approximately Rs 16 lakh crore, including Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). The central government alone has budgeted Rs 11.21 lakh crore for capex in 2025-26. The effective capital expenditure, which includes core capital outlays and grants for



state capital assets, is projected to rise to Rs 15.48 lakh crore from Rs 13.18 lakh crore in 2024-25.

Sitharaman dismissed concerns that the focus had shifted to consumption, stating that the government's emphasis has consistently been on public expenditure to build capital assets, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. She reassured stake-

holders that the increased tax relief, which primarily benefits middle-class taxpayers, is aimed at enhancing disposable income for consumption and investment, not at sidelining the capital expenditure drive.

The income tax relief, which raises the exemption limit from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, was positioned as part of the government's strategy to support economic recovery. Sitharaman also credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for supporting the tax relief proposal, recognizing the need to reward taxpayers while maintaining the focus on infrastructure development.

In conclusion, Sitharaman reiterated that the government's approach remains balanced, with continued investment in capital assets and targeted tax relief to stimulate consumption, creating a strong foundation for future economic growth.

Establishing New World Finance Broader Impact Of Bitcoin On Global Economy



Bitcoin's emergence in 2008, closely following the global economic crisis, marked the beginning of a transformative journey in the world of finance. Although Bitcoin was initially not viewed as a significant player in the global economy, it gradually became a symbol of the future of finance. Over the past decade, Bitcoin has not only revolutionized digital currency but has also influenced key aspects of global finance through blockchain technology and decentralization.

The most profound effect Bitcoin has had on the global economy is through the rise of blockchain technology, which underpins it. Initially met with skepticism, blockchain's decentralized nature has reshaped cross-border transactions, offering greater speed, transparency, and affordability. Bitcoin's market capitalization, which exceeds \$1.9 trillion, is evidence of its growing importance as a tool for value creation. Blockchain has also spurred the rise of Decentralized Finance (DeFi), further accelerating financial innovation. The increased use of Bitcoin and blockchain-based jobs is diversifying conventional finance, offering opportunities for employment and income generation worldwide.

The economic impact of Bitcoin extends beyond technology. The global cryptocurrency industry, valued at \$2.7 trillion in 2024, is projected to grow to \$6.2 trillion by 2033. Bitcoin's rise has led to the creation of new job roles, with salaries in the sector often exceeding 150% of traditional industries. The taxation of Bitcoin-related income, such as in India (30% tax) and the US (up to 37% short-term tax), has also contributed to national and global economies, supporting governments' budgets.

In addition, Bitcoin's role as a hedge against inflation has been especially beneficial in countries with unstable currencies. Nations like Venezuela and Lebanon, suffering from hyperinflation, have turned to Bitcoin as an alternative currency to safeguard economic stability. As Bitcoin's influence continues to grow, its potential to reshape global economic policies remains significant, promising a future where digital finance becomes the backbone of global economies.

Reliance Industries Surpasses Apple to Rank No. 2 in FutureBrand Index 2024

In a significant milestone for Indian corporations, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) has been ranked No. 2 in the FutureBrand Index 2024, surpassing tech giant Apple. This marks the first time an Indian company has entered the top three of this prestigious global ranking, reflecting the increasing global influence of Indian businesses.

The FutureBrand Index evaluates companies based on brand perception, not financial performance, and in 2024, Reliance saw a remarkable jump from No. 13 in 2023 to No. 2. This achievement highlights the company's strong brand positioning, consumer trust, and strategic growth across multiple sectors such as energy, telecommunications, and retail.

The FutureBrand Index has evolved over the years, with the global rankings becoming more diversified. In 2014, seven of

the top ten brands were from the United States, but by 2024, only four US brands remain in the top ten. In contrast, the Asia-Pacific (APAC) and Middle Eastern regions now boast five brands in the top ranks, demonstrating their significant investments in brand development, especially in B2B sectors.

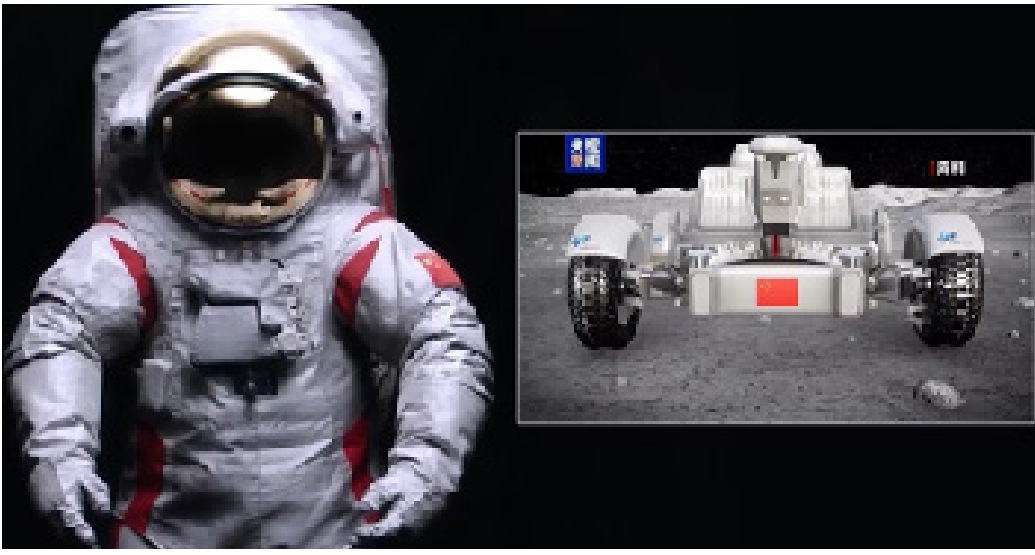
Samsung, which ranked No. 5 in 2023, has risen to the No. 1 position in 2024. The company's focus on innovation, storytelling, and authenticity has driven its success, along with its strong scores in thought leadership and consumer well-being. Apple, while still a top contender, dropped from No. 1 in 2023 to No. 3 this year, maintaining its reputation for brand loyalty and customer experience.

The finance sector emerged as the strongest performer in the 2024 index, with 10 out of 15 brands showing upward mo-



mentum, signaling robust growth and increasing consumer trust. Conversely, the healthcare sector struggled, with 10 out of 15 brands declining, reflecting ongoing challenges in public perception and industry turbulence. Overall, the 2024 FutureBrand Index underscores the shifting dynamics in global brand power, with Reliance's rise marking a notable achievement for Indian businesses on the world stage.

China Names Its Moon Spacesuit and Rover Ahead of Lunar Mission



gressing through its development phase. Zhang Chongfeng, a spacecraft designer at CMSA, revealed that the rover prototype has been tested in a simulated lunar surface environment. The rover is undergoing design refinements and engineering assessments to ensure its effectiveness in transporting astronauts across the moon's challenging terrain. China's lunar mission framework is taking shape as the nation aims to land astronauts on the moon before 2030. CMSA has made significant progress in the development of ground facilities for production and testing, and construction at the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site in Hainan is advancing. Additionally, CMSA announced the names of other mission components, including the crew spacecraft, "Mengzhou" ("Dream Vessel"), and the lunar lander, "Lanyue" ("Embracing the Moon").

This mission is part of China's broader space exploration goals, which include advancing technology and scientific research beyond low Earth orbit. With an integrated system of heavy-lift launch vehicles, crewed spacecraft, and lunar surface mobility solutions, China is taking significant steps toward its ambitious goal of establishing a human presence on the moon.

China has officially unveiled the names for its next-generation lunar spacesuit and crewed moon rover, key components for its planned human moon landing before 2030. The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) revealed that the spacesuit will be called "Wangyu," meaning "gazing into the cosmos," while the rover has been named "Tansuo," which translates to "explore." Over 9,000 suggestions were submitted during a public participation process in 2024, culminating in the final selection of these names.

The spacesuit, Wangyu, is designed to withstand the harsh conditions of the moon's surface, providing astronauts with enhanced mobility and protection. According to Zhang Wanxin, director of the spacesuit engineering office at the China Astronaut Research and Training Center, the prototype has already been developed, and performance assessments are currently underway to ensure it meets the required operational standards.

The Tansuo rover, which will facilitate lunar surface exploration, is also pro-

Manipur Street Stall Selling Dalgona Candies Looks Straight Out Of Squid Game

The global phenomenon *Squid Game* continues to inspire creative ventures around the world, and now, fans in Manipur have brought the hit show to life with a Squid Game-themed roadside stall. Digital creator Lanchenba Meitei recently shared a video on Instagram, showcasing this innovative tribute to the Korean series. The stall features a variety of Dalgona candies, one of the key elements of the show, shaped like umbrellas, triangles, stars, and circles, just like in the famous "Dalgona candy challenge" from *Squid Game*.

The stall's design pays homage to the iconic aesthetic of the series, with the owners dressed in pink jumpsuits and wearing masks similar to the guards in the show. The stall's banner prominently displays the words "Dalgona" and "Squid Game," along with an image of the protagonist, Seong Gi-hun, holding a Dalgona candy. The background features a poster of the infamous doll from the "Red Light, Green Light" game, one of the most memorable scenes from the series. To add to the immersive experience, the background music includes the popular



song "Round and Round" from *Squid Game*'s second season, instantly evoking the show's atmosphere.

The stall not only offers the delicious Dalgona candies but also showcases other *Squid Game*-themed merchandise. Fans can purchase Ddakji cards, a nod to the game played during the selection process in subway stations, as well as coasters featuring images of the show's

characters. The stall has quickly become a popular stop for fans of the show, combining the thrill of the series with the charm of local creativity in Manipur.

This unique pop-up stall is a testament to the global impact of *Squid Game* and how it continues to inspire cultural references and creative displays worldwide.

Chinese Zoo Paints Donkeys To Look Like Zebras, Leaves Netizens Annoyed



A Chinese zoo has come under scrutiny after it allegedly painted donkeys to pass them off as zebras in an attempt to attract more visitors. The stunt, which took place at a zoo in Zibo City, Shandong province, quickly backfired after keen-eyed netizens recognized the creatures

for what they truly were—donkeys, not zebras.

The controversy began when a video went viral showing a zoo worker standing next to a donkey with black and white stripes across its body. However, the worker left the donkey's face un-

touched, which made it even more obvious that it was not a zebra. The attempt to disguise the donkey as a zebra was so poorly executed that online viewers immediately noticed the difference, sparking a wave of jokes and criticism across social media platforms.

In response to the growing uproar, representatives from the amusement park told Chinese media that the painted donkeys were part of a "marketing strategy." However, their explanation did little to quell the backlash, with many criticizing the zoo for trying to deceive visitors. The debacle has raised questions about the ethics of using such deceptive practices in animal exhibits. While the zoo's marketing attempt may have been intended to draw attention, it ultimately served as a reminder of the power of social media and the sharp eye of internet users. The incident also highlights the importance of authenticity in tourism, with visitors increasingly expecting transparency and honesty from attractions.

Despite the failed stunt, the story has given the zoo a fleeting moment of fame—though likely not the kind they had hoped for. Instead of gaining new visitors through their creativity, they have become the subject of ridicule and mockery online.

OpenAI Shifts Focus to GPT-5, Cancels Standalone o3 AI Model



OpenAI CEO Sam Altman recently announced that the company has decided not to release the highly anticipated o3 artificial intelligence (AI) model. Instead of launching the o3 model as planned, OpenAI will now focus on a unified GPT-5 model, which will integrate the capabilities of o3.

Altman shared details about the company's updated AI roadmap, revealing that OpenAI will simplify its product offerings with the release of GPT-4.5 and GPT-5. The goal is to eliminate user confusion when choosing between various models for different tasks. Instead of offering multiple specialized models, GPT-5 will be designed to deliver "unified intelligence," meaning it will be capable of utilizing all OpenAI tools and know when to apply reasoning without users having to choose the appropriate model for each task.

The cancellation of the o3 model's standalone release marks the end of the o-series of AI models, with the company opting to integrate the features of o3 di-

rectly into GPT-5. Altman also announced changes to OpenAI's tiered subscription model. When GPT-5 is launched, all ChatGPT users will have access to the AI model, with free-tier users receiving unlimited chat access at the standard intelligence level. To prevent misuse, the company will impose abuse thresholds. Pro subscribers will get access to a higher intelligence level, and the top-tier subscribers will have the most advanced capabilities. GPT-5 will also introduce new features, including Advanced Voice, Canvas, Search, and Deep Research. However, before GPT-5 arrives, OpenAI plans to launch GPT-4.5, its last non-chain-of-thought (non-CoT) model. While the exact release date is still unclear, Altman suggested that GPT-4.5 could arrive in the coming weeks or months. Interestingly, GPT-4.5, internally referred to as "Orion," was initially rumored to be GPT-5 itself.

With these developments, OpenAI is aiming to streamline its AI offerings and deliver a more efficient, user-friendly experience.

Apple Maps may soon include ads to boost services revenue



Apple Maps, which has long maintained an ad-free experience, is set to introduce ads on its platform. According to a Bloomberg report, the decision to integrate advertisements follows Apple's ongoing effort to enhance its services revenue. Business owners will soon have the opportunity to promote their locations within the app, a move that mirrors the advertising model used by Google Maps.

This shift in Apple Maps' strategy follows an internal all-hands meeting where the company's board gave the green light to explore the inclusion of ads. Although discussions around adding ads to Apple Maps have been ongoing since 2022, the rollout was initially expected in 2023 but was delayed for unspecified reasons.

Apple Maps users, who have enjoyed an ad-free experience up until now, will soon encounter promoted listings for businesses, making it more similar to other mapping platforms like Google

Maps, which has long allowed businesses to pay for visibility in search results and map locations.

By introducing ads, Apple aims to diversify its services revenue, which has become an increasingly important part of the company's financial growth. As Apple continues to expand its advertising initiatives across its ecosystem, including the App Store and other apps, the move to include ads in Apple Maps marks another step in the company's broader strategy to increase earnings from services.

The exact timeline for the launch of ads on Apple Maps has not been confirmed, but business owners will soon be able to begin promoting their locations to potential customers directly through the platform. This change may offer new opportunities for businesses looking to increase their visibility within the app, while also contributing to Apple's overall revenue growth.

Indian Women's Hockey Team Aims for Victory Against Spain in FIH Pro League



The Indian Women's Hockey Team is eager to return to winning ways as they face Spain in the FIH Pro League 2024-25 on February 18 and 19 at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium. After a 3-2 win over England and a tough 2-2 draw followed by a shootout loss, India sits in eighth place with four points. With a focus on improving penalty corner conversions, the team aims to rectify their previ-

ous mistakes. Vice-captain Navneet Kaur, with a goal in each game, has been in strong form. Spain, currently in fourth place with eight points, comes off back-to-back wins over Germany. India captain Salima Tete expressed confidence, stating the team is ready for the challenge, aiming to build momentum with a solid performance in front of the home crowd.

Rajasthan Kings Set Up Final Showdown with Chhattisgarh Warriors in Legend 90 League



als in Qualifier 2 at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium. Batting first, Delhi Royals posted a competitive 167/5 in 15 overs, with Lendl Simmons (63 off 34) and Sharad Lumba (60 off 24) leading the charge. Despite a strong start, the Kings made a strong comeback, with Sudeep Tyagi's crucial delivery forcing Simmons' retirement. Rajasthan Kings chased the target with ease, thanks to explosive knocks from Phil Mustard (53* off 34) and Rajat Singh (56 off 28). The final will be played against Chhattisgarh Warriors on Monday at 7:15 pm, featuring a special performance by Bollywood star Thamman Bhatia.

Rajasthan Kings booked their spot in the grand finale of the Legend 90 League with a dominant six-wicket victory over Delhi Roy-

23rd National Para Athletics Championships Kick Off in Chennai

The 23rd National Para Athletics Championships have officially commenced at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai, marking a historic first for the city. The event, running from February 17 to 20, features a massive participation of 1,476 para-athletes across 30 teams, competing in 155 events. Organized under the guidance of Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin and supported by the Tamil Nadu Government, the championship is one of the largest para-athletics gatherings in India.

The Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), led by Devendra Jhajharia, and the Tamil Nadu Paralympic Sports Association (TNPSA), headed by Chandrasekar Rajan, are overseeing the successful execution of the



event. With world-class facilities and strong government support, the championship not only celebrates para-athlete talent but also fosters inclusivity and excellence in Indian sports.

23rd National Para Athletics Championships Kick Off in Chennai



With Jasprit Bumrah sidelined due to injury, India's hopes in the 2024 ICC Champions Trophy rest on Mohammed Shami's shoulders. Set to partner Arshdeep Singh, Shami's experience and wrist wizardry are expected to be pivotal in India's campaign. The 34-year-old, returning from injury, faces the challenge of delivering in a high-pressure tournament, especially without Bumrah, his trusted ally for years. Shami's impact with the new ball will be crucial, and former pacer Laxmipathy Balaji believes the bowler can step up and lead India's attack. With his ability to move the ball off the deck and hit the stumps, Shami's leadership and skills are vital for India's Champions Trophy aspirations.

Crispin Chettri Names 23-Member Squad for Pink Ladies Cup in UAE



Indian senior women's football team coach Crispin Chettri has announced a 23-member squad for the upcoming Pink Ladies Cup, a friendly tournament set to take place in Sharjah, UAE, from February 20 to 26. India will face Jordan, Russia, and the Korean Republic in this tournament, providing valuable preparation for the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2027 Qualifiers. India's matches are scheduled at the Al Hamriya Sports Club Stadium, Sharjah, with the team set to play Jordan on February 20, Russia on February 23, and Korea Republic on February 26. The squad includes goalkeepers Elangbam Panthoi Chanu, Payal Basude, and Shreya Hooda, along with defenders Aruna Bag, Kiran Pisdha, and others. Coach Chettri emphasized the importance of adapting to different playing styles for a well-rounded team performance.

um, Sharjah, with the team set to play Jordan on February 20, Russia on February 23, and Korea Republic on February 26. The squad includes goalkeepers Elangbam Panthoi Chanu, Payal Basude, and Shreya Hooda, along with defenders Aruna Bag, Kiran Pisdha, and others. Coach Chettri emphasized the importance of adapting to different playing styles for a well-rounded team performance.

Indian Men Aim to Continue Winning Momentum Against Germany in FIH Pro League



India's men's hockey team will look to build on their recent victory as they take on Germany in their next FIH Pro League match on Tuesday. After a tough start to their campaign, the team bounced back with a 2-0 win over Spain on Sunday, earning three points from two matches and sitting eighth in the standings. India's victory against Spain was marked by field goals from Mandeep Singh and Dilpreet Singh, but the team continues to face challenges with penalty corner conversions, having failed to score from seven attempts so far. Captain Harmanpreet Singh's return to the lineup is expected to strengthen the set-piece execution. Germany, currently seventh in the standings with four points, will be India's next challenge, with their attack led by Raphael Hartkopf, Gonzalo Peillat, and Thies Prinz. Harmanpreet emphasized the need to stay focused and improve in key areas to secure another win.

MoS Sports Inaugurates Maharashtra Esports Open Championship 2025

Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, Raksha Nikhil Khadse, inaugurated the Maharashtra Esports Open Championship 2025 at MIT World Peace University, marking a historic milestone in the state's sports history. This state-backed tournament, organized by the Federation of Electronic Sports Associations India (FEAI) and the Maratha Esports Association (MEA), has attracted 2,100 participants, with 52 finalists advancing to the Grand Finale. Khadse highlighted the growing

significance of esports, which became a medal sport at the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games and will feature in the 2027 Olympic Esports Games. The Government of India's recognition of esports as a "multi-sport event" and the recent introduction of cash incentives for outstanding players further cements esports' status. With over 500 million gamers in India, Maharashtra is positioned to be the country's esports hub, poised for explosive growth and future Olympic success.



Kanika Kapoor Unveils 'Gori Hai Kalaiyan 2.0' – A Vibrant Reinterpretation of a Classic



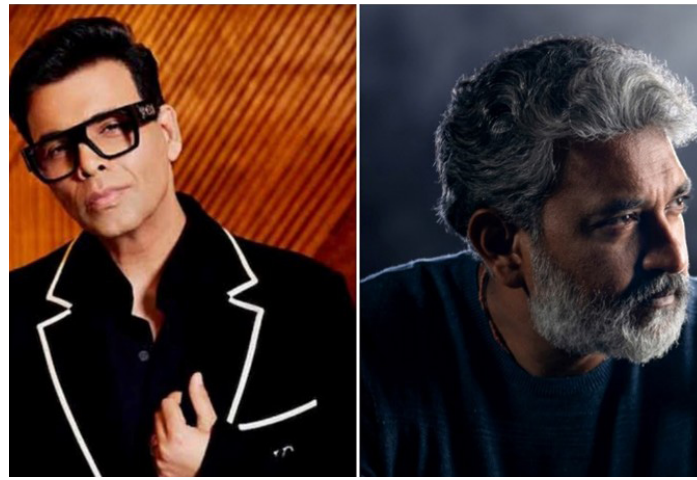
Singer Kanika Kapoor is back with a fresh, energetic take on the iconic track Gori Hai Kalaiyan for the upcoming film Mere Husband Ki Biwi, releasing on February 21. Featuring Badshah, Sharvi Yadav, and IP Singh, the song blends nostalgia with a modern vibe, earning buzz for its upbeat rhythm. Kanika, known for hits like Baby Doll and Chittiyaan Kalaiyaan, calls the track a perfect fit for her playful, high-energy style. She shares her excitement about experimenting with different genres, including Afro and R&B. Despite the pressure of maintaining success, Kanika sees it as motivation, focusing on enjoying the creative journey. With upcoming collaborations, she's eager to share more diverse music soon.

AR Murugadoss Announces Title of Upcoming Sivakarthikeyan Film as Madharasi



The much-anticipated film directed by AR Murugadoss, starring Sivakarthikeyan, has officially been titled Madharasi. The announcement was made on Sivakarthikeyan's birthday, adding excitement to his fans. The film, previously referred to as #SKXARM, promises a high-octane action-packed experience. A teaser featuring intense action sequences was shared by Murugadoss, hinting at a role for actor Biju Menon as a cop. The movie also stars Rukmini Vasanth, Vidyut Jammwal, Shabeer Kallarakkal, and Vikranth. The film, 90% complete, will wrap up after Murugadoss finishes working on Salman Khan's project. Produced by Sri Lakshmi Movies, Madharasi features music by Anirudh Ravichander and cinematography by Sudeep Elamon. The film's visual effects will be handled by Knack Studios, Phantom FX, and BeastBells.

Karan Johar Praises SS Rajamouli's "Conviction" in Filmmaking



Karan Johar recently discussed the key to creating blockbuster films – conviction in one's craft. In a conversation with Komal Nahata for his YouTube channel Game Changers, Johar highlighted that conviction is more important than logic in filmmaking. He specifically mentioned SS Rajamouli, stating that his films, such as RRR, thrive not on logic but on Rajamouli's unwavering conviction.

Johar explained, "When conviction comes to the forefront, even the audience believes in it," citing examples like RRR, Animal, and Gadar as films driven by this powerful belief. He also noted that the moment filmmakers doubt themselves or overthink logic, it can hinder a film's success. Johar, who has a good rapport with Rajamouli, had previously presented the Hindi version of Baahubali 2.

Producer SKN Faces Backlash Over Comments on Telugu Actresses



Producer SKN (Srinivasa Kumar Naidu), who introduced actress Vaishnavi Chaitanya as the heroine in Baby, has sparked controversy with his recent remarks about Telugu actresses. Speaking at the pre-release event of Return of Dragon, SKN mentioned that he and director Sai Rajesh had decided not to promote Telugu actresses anymore. He explained that they had realized the consequences of supporting Telugu girls, leading to their decision. These comments are believed to be aimed at Vaishnavi, who reportedly declined another film offer from SKN's banner after the success of Baby. Many netizens have criticized SKN's remarks, claiming they are inappropriate, especially as Telugu actresses are gaining recognition in the industry.

New Releases This (February 17 & February 21): Must-Watch Movies & Shows

1. Mere Husband Ki Biwi (Feb 21) - Theatres



A comedy-drama about a man juggling relationships with his wife and girlfriend, starring Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, and Bhumi Pednekar.

2. Nilavuku En Mel Ennadi Kobam (Feb 21) - Theatres



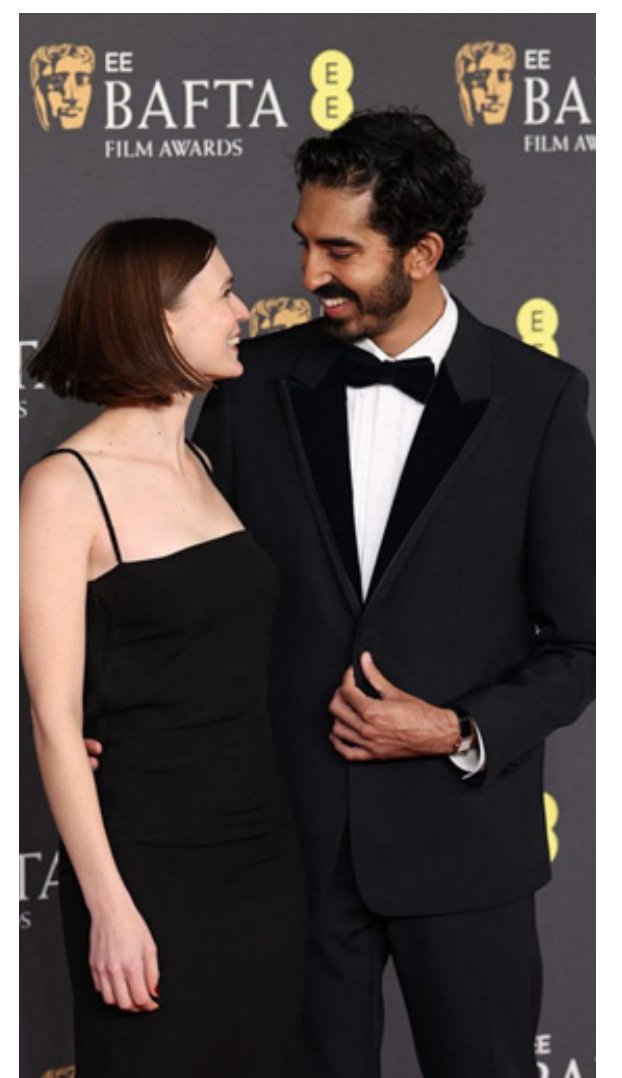
Dhanush's directorial debut featuring his nephew Pavish, a love story with Anikha Surendran and Priya Prakash Varrier.

3. The White Lotus Season 3 (Feb 17) - JioHotstar



Set in Thailand, the new season follows a group of privileged vacationers at a luxury resort.

BAFTA Awards 2025: 'Conclave' Wins Best Film, Indian Films Earn Recognition



At the 2025 BAFTA Awards, British-Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri's Santosh, Karan Kandhari's Sister Midnight, and Dev Patel's directorial debut Monkey Man did not secure wins in the Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer category, which went to Irish filmmaker Rich Peppiatt for Kneecap. Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine As Light lost the Best Film Not in the English Language award to Emilia Perez, despite its Cannes victory. Conclave, a papal thriller starring Ralph Fiennes, took home the coveted Best Film and Best British Film awards. Other notable winners included Brady Corbet (Best Director for The Brutalist), Mikey Madison (Best Actress for Anora), and Kieran Culkin (Best Supporting Actor for A Real Pain).